

[History of Haiti in 17th-19th Centuries]

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LIFE IN A HAITIAN VALLEY

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Some of these charges may be reviewed. One, frequently met with and already mentioned, concerns the general lack of cleanliness and sanitation that marks the cities. As has been shown, this stems directly from the patterns of life which prevailed under French control. The matter of personal morals is also often discussed with anything but praise for Haitian custom. Quite aside from the polygamous tradition of Africa, the influence of which will be discussed later, it is only necessary to recall the example set for these slaves by the sex customs of the Créoles and other Europeans with whom they came into contact to see how the ideal of monogamic union would not be entirely convincing as one to be followed in all its implications. The failure of the Catholic Church to stamp out the African cults in Haiti, and the skepticism with which, as will be pointed out, the motivation of the priests is regarded by the Haitians must have been strengthened by the tradition of the misbehavior of those who were in charge of the religion into which baptism was mandatory, before the days of freedom.

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The instability of Haitian political life, and the venality of judges and other officials have been stressed again and again in the writings of those who have passed judgment on Haiti. Yet one need but read of the readiness of the white colonists to revolt against the authority set over them by the mother country,³³ and of the manner in which during the French Revolution attempts to alleviate the position of the colored and Negro portions of the population were thwarted by the illegal political activities of the plantation slave-owners,³⁴ to understand at least some of the sources from which direct political action derives its sanctions. One need similarly but read comments in letters and books of the time concerning the corruption of the officials of the colony³⁵ to conclude that, since her independence, Haiti has in such respects but continued a tradition set by the rulers who governed the country before the Republic was established. Thus if the life of the Haitian

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Negro peasant of today presents aspects of harshness or instability, it would seem proper to ask how much of this might be ascribed to the examples which these Negroes were set by their masters, rather than unequivocally to assume inherent racial tendencies to account for them, as is so often done. 17
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This, of course, is far from the whole story. For just as there were large numbers of colonists who were men of integrity and lived in accordance with the best traditions of their French heritage, so among the Negroes were many who sensed these deficiencies in the regime to which they had been enslaved, and held tenaciously to their African traditions, not only in religion, but in social, economic, and political phases, so that, when the time was ripe, these might in some measure be re-established. To approach the matter realistically, it must be recognised that just as the Africans in the islands represented numerous tribes having varying customs, and individual members of these groups possessed varying degrees of integrity and worth, so the French who came to live there and whose slaves learned of French culture from them represented not necessarily the flower of that culture, but were in the main derived from the extremes of French society, the unadjusted and maladjusted lower classes and the aristocrats. What was bequeathed by them to the Haitians, therefore, were those aspects of French civilization which, to the extent that they were accepted by the Negroes, are partially responsible not only for the graciousness, the hospitality, and the generosity of the Haitian of today, but also for the less pleasant aspects of the culture that have resulted from his historical development since independence. 178
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66 The course of events leading up to Duvalier's election are difficult to assess. Fignolé, whom the army had permitted to serve as president for sixteen days during the interregnum, had been denied official recognition by the United States, suggesting that this country feared the implications of his political philosophy; his attempts at passing a whole new code of far-reaching social legislation apparently frightened the army, which removed him on grounds of "maintaining order." By the time an election decree was promulgated in August 1957, Fignolé was disqualified, and Jumelle had been forced to withdraw from candidacy. By election day, September 1957, only Déjoie and Duvalier were in contention, while Jumelle had gone into hiding. An attempted general strike, probably led by Déjoieiste elements, was stopped by the army, and Dr. François Duvalier was elected to power.

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643 The Duvalier regime, beyond any doubt, has added something new to the Haitian political scene. To begin with, it must be stressed that Duvalier enjoys some popular support in the countryside as well as in the urban centers. For many Haitians, Duvalier epitomizes the return of the Estimé philosophy to Haiti, and it would be a serious political error to suppose that the present regime is no more than an elite-hating dictatorship backed by machine guns. At the same time, the readiness of the Duvalieristes to use force probably exceeds that of any Haitian government in more than a century. Its excesses, moreover, appear to break certain traditions of political behavior—for instance, the unwillingness to take familial connections into account when political revenge is being carried out, the violence committed against women and adolescents regarded as political enemies, and so on. The most important break with tradition, however, has been the gradual undermining of the army as a political force—a force created in the first instance during the United States occupation.

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643 In carrying out its plans, the Duvalier government has played more creatively upon inconsistencies in United States policy than any preceding regime. It used United States military and economic power to consolidate itself, while employing a posture of anti-North American hostility in its search for other internal sources of political support. Most strikingly, it has capitalized on the deterioration of the United States design in the Caribbean region, both to exact concessions and to enhance an international image of itself as a stalwart "democratic"

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regime. That President Duvalier has been able to stay in power in spite of internal disaffection, sometime hostile United States propaganda, a dire economic situation, personal ill health, and other woes, is a tribute to his political acumen, if not to his principles. None of this means, of course, that such consummate skill will continue to work; Haitian governments have a way of falling suddenly, and the Duvalier regime will probably not prove an exception.

Dr. Duvalier's success indicates that he has made certain correct assessments, not only of Haiti's social and political structure but also of United States policy with regard to Haiti. The occupation was notable for its failure to make any telling alterations in the economic structure or level of development of the country. Many beneficial changes were made, as Leyburn demonstrates, particularly in the areas of health and health services, communications, government administration, education, and transport (though the use of corvée labor on the roads led to serious abuses, and stimulated sanguinary guerilla warfare). But most significantly, the United States institutionalized the army and police forces. The ragged bands of political mercenaries of the past were dissolved; the officer-ridden army was transformed into a small, well-trained, and well-organized force. Eventual firm control by this force of weaponry, communications, and transport ended the era of presidential succession by invasion, turned the army into the major locus of nonelectoral, president-making power, and may have ended forever the possibility of an agrarian revolt against the central authority. Another political effect of the occupation was the importance it imparted to the United States ambassador, whose political opinions thereafter would matter significantly in the transmission of power at the top of the Haitian governmental system. The Duvalier regime has continuously taken full account of the consequences of United States interest; and its leaders have been able to watch the operation of that interest in the political events occurring between the fall of the Lescot government and the present.

In the view of one acute observer, President Duvalier, in order to consolidate his power, had to cope with three other loci of political strength in addition to the army and the United States ambassador. The business community, located for the most part in Port-au-Prince, had strongly supported D'Éjean's candidacy during the interregnum; its leaders were mainly members of the elite, and many had strong

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175 business and personal ties with North Americans and other foreign
 643 groups. Among the families of these leaders are Swiss, German, and
 66 French nationals, and some Syrians and Lebanese who hold United
 795 States citizenship. The business community had played a part in the
 downfall of the Magloire regime, and business strikes were a typical
 political instrument for putting pressure on presidential incumbents.
 In addition, the clergy—particularly the Catholic clergy—exerted
 political influence. Duvalier, while well aware of this, also attended
 to the importance of vodoun* in Haiti, and to the influence wielded
 by its cult leaders, particularly in the countryside and among the
 urban poor. Finally, the President understood the strength of groups
 such as the university students, the small but politically aware labor
 unions, and certain professional associations, whose political strength
 could be felt particularly in times of crisis. The Duvalier regime has
 displayed intelligence as well as ruthlessness in dealing with these di-
 verse centers of political strength and potential opposition.

176 The official request for a United States Marine Corps mission to
 648 "train" the Haitian Army was a brilliant political move by Duvalier,
 701 apparently designed to serve several objectives simultaneously. It is
 702 entirely correct that the renewed presence of the Marines in Haiti
 66 created considerable rancor in some circles, but it also strengthened
 Duvalier's hand in his dealings with all sources of internal opposition.
 To some extent it apparently reassured the business community; and
 it turned out to have reduced, rather than to have increased, the ma-
 neuverability of the United States in developing a "corrective" or
 "restraining" policy toward the Duvalier regime. Perhaps most im-
 portant, it helped Duvalier in his plan to build a praetorian guard to
 counterbalance the power of the army itself.

625 The *tonton macoute*—a Creole epithet for the bogeyman—is an ex-
 tremely interesting variation on the security police theme. Its mem-
 6701 bers wear no official uniform (though blue denim pants and felt hats
 are affected). Members of the "TTM" carry out acts of terrorism
 6652 against groups and individuals and have seriously weakened the po-
 licing function and prestige of the regular army. Some calculations
 put the operating costs of the TTM as high as one third of the govern-
 mental budget. Though small groups of the TTM are distributed

* Or, as it is more commonly called, "voodoo." Creole words employed in this introduc-
 tion are transcribed in Leubach orthography (see Hall, 1933). It was not possible to extend this
 transcriptions to the original Leyburn text, where a "Galic" orthography is followed.

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457 country. The complete enfeeblement of tourism has also led to some
 445 migration and to an accompanying decline of services and service
 668 "industries" in the capital. These losses have surely hurt Haiti and
 642 have damaged its chances for growth as well as its capacity to main-
 66 tain the health, education, and morale of its people. It is not clear,
 167 however, to what extent such changes may have produced a negative
 political reaction to the Duvalier regime. Urban support for Dr. Du-
 valier appears to have come from some intellectuals, from some army
 officers, and from portions of the urban lower classes; but numerically
 most important were those low-paid but literate and aspiring wage-
 earners whom the Comhaire-Sylvains (1959) refer to as "Class III"
 members. These observers have stressed that the Class III group con-
 sisted mainly of industrial employees, those engaged in food-proces-
 sing, hotel services, workshops, and the like. It was this group that
 the Comhaire-Sylvains credited with the Duvalier victory in 1957,
 pointing out in addition that "in the small country towns almost all
 officials, both civil and military, and traders, seemed to belong to this
 class" (p. 185). If the economic crisis that has gripped Haiti in recent
 years severely affects the position of this class, the political situation
 will reflect as much. But the ideology of Class III members—so far as
 it can be inferred at all—would suggest that one Duvalier may merely
 be replaced by another. At the same time, the depopulation of those
 groupings whose members might have led a qualitatively different
 kind of opposition, during the period of tenure of the United States
 Marine Corps Mission to Duvalier, may have indefinitely postponed
 the opportunity for creating a genuinely new political direction.

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To state it another way, there are no signs at this time that the re-
 gime in power will be pulled down by any organized Haitian opposi-
 tion. More important, since regimes resting on a narrow popular base
 have a way of falling without change, there is no indication that
 within Haiti's present national institutional structure, a genuine op-
 position to Duvalier-type governments can take shape. This means
 that even if regime should follow regime in rapid succession, there is
 little reason to expect that any of them could effect fundamental
 changes in Haitian society. If such an interpretation is correct, it pre-
 supposes an internal equilibrium or stasis so strong that no force for
 change in half a century has been able to make a politically significant
 difference.

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This pessimistic view is supported by what is known at this time

CASTE LINES BECOME PERMANENT

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"empire" tottered to economic ruin. Graft, default on the debt, increasing deficits, and debased currency were the order of the day, and so continued until 1859, when the accumulation of anger over the useless wars and the humiliating defeats made the Emperor so unpopular that a new and more carefully planned revolution accomplished his downfall.

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Fifteen years of administration by Negro rulers had broken the political power of the colored elite. Only three light-skinned men became president thereafter until the occupation of Haiti by the American Marines in 1915; in the seventy-two years following Boyer's downfall, mulattoes ruled during only eight. The army under a black general was too powerful, a colored president too hampered by suspicion, to make the political game worth the candle. The colored elite, therefore, adapted themselves to existing conditions as best they could, controlling the business life of Haiti, filling the law offices and, because of their literacy, the secretaryships of state, and indulging in honorific cultural pursuits.

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In the years after Soulouque the basic realities of Haitian life were changed hardly at all by shifting political administrations. Some of the presidents were mildly progressive, many were indifferent; still more were actually harmful; but the lives of the mass of peasants were not often touched by presidential vagaries. Politics was an affair almost wholly of townspeople, of the army, the elite, and the pseudo-elite. Revolutions, counterrevolutions, movements of reform, international tangles, financial woes, and most of the other complications to which unstable states are heir, absorbed the attention of rulers and upper-class folk who were politically inclined.

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Constitutions were made by presidents and changed by their successors; the Senate passed contradictory laws in the same session if the chief executive so recommended; the courts were presided over by the president's men. Haitian law in the latter half of the nineteenth century was what the president's immediate strength and wish made it—or else it was folk custom, undisturbed by the rulers.

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Never once, in the three quarters of a century after Boyer's time, did Haiti approach the high standard of production known in colonial days or in the early years of independence. The pattern of Haitian social and economic life became fixed in this seventy-five years. Haiti became a country of small-scale tillage by a peasant population, with only enough external trade to provide moderate

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Immediately a division of political opinion was evident, one which was to persist throughout the century. No one denied the inevitability in 1804 of making Dessalines the head of state: he was the victorious commander, clearly the most powerful man in Haiti. The division of opinion arose over the manner in which he should rule, whether as military dictator, or as a responsible president. Dessalines settled the matter peremptorily—if only for the time being—by asserting his self as a dictator.

The issue did not die with his decision, however, for it had deep roots. Supporting Dessalines wholeheartedly was the group of generals who were all Negroes, all ex-slaves, all practically illiterate. The three most influential of these blacks were Christophe, later to succeed his general; Chanletre, and Boisrond-Tonnère. Those who preferred a government in which the president shared power with a legislature of important men were, on the contrary, almost all afranchis of the old régime, therefore the most cultured and educated men in the country. Most of them were mulattoes or at least of a lighter complexion than the Negroes, although of course some blacks adhered to their position. The leaders of this group were Pétion, Boyer, Inginac, and Gérin. This division of opinion went back even into the decade preceding independence, when the island, free of slavery, was still technically under the rule of France, and the ex-slave Toussaint had to fight and conquer the mulatto leader Rigaud before he could establish his rule as dictator.

For a brief moment after independence, all differences were reconciled, since all had been united in a common cause against the enemy. Dessalines was then commanding in the Artibonite Valley, and Christophe in the North; two of Rigaud's former lieutenants, Pétion and Geffrard, commanded in the West and South. Apparently there was genuine respect among these men for each other. Dessalines, for example, with evident sincerity calls his colleague Pétion "that man of upright heart." The unity was short-lived, however. Not only was it evident that Dessalines meant to rule like an African despot-chief, taking advice only when he liked it; it was even more plain that through his cruelty, impetuosity, and crudeness he was bent on isolating Haiti from all contact with the culture and polish of the outer world. Pétion and his group looked on with pained disgust as he indulged his violence against the whites who had hopefully remained in the country; the general's bloody procession throughout

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175 the land, leaving a trail of misery and death, was an augury of what
 643 to expect from a tyrant. They opposed his plan to destroy all coastal
 642 towns and move the people inland where, protected by their moun-
 66 tains, they would be immune to foreign attack and foreign ideas.
 They resented their loss of property by state expropriation, and could
 not fail to be shocked by the grim exultation of Boisrond-Tonnère:
 "To draw up the act of independence, we used the skin of a white
 man for parchment, his skull for an inkstand, his blood for ink, and
 a bayonet for pen!"³

Even without such cogent objections to Dessalines the mulattoes
 would have opposed his dictatorship, for as intellectuals and as social
 élite they wanted a real share in the government. For this they had
 agitated since before 1791, and it would be a grim irony if after
 fourteen years of intermittent conflict the successful expulsion of
 whites should be followed by a continued exclusion of mulattoes
 from the government. It would be a worse irony to throw off the
 white yoke only to take on a black one. When in 1805 Dessalines
 made himself emperor they asked for the creation of a nobility,
 thinking to share the rule with him; but the Emperor's curt "*Moi
 seul je suis noble*" dashed this hope. Although detailed proof is lack-
 ing, it is generally accepted in Haiti that the conspiracies against the
 Emperor's life began with this intransigent statement.

Here, then, was the issue which in half a dozen varying forms was
 to split political opinion for decades: rule by a single tyrant vs. rule
 by the cultured class. It even made two nations of one between the
 years 1806 and 1820.

175 When Dessalines was assassinated, a Constituent Assembly was
 642 summoned to draw up a new constitution and select a new ruler.
 The mulattoes were in control of the Assembly which under Pétion's
 skilful guidance sat at the mulatto stronghold, Port-au-Prince, and
 there drew up a constitution assuring the limitation of the president's
 power by a Senate, and requiring election and reelection of the
 president instead of permitting him life tenure. This achieved, the
 [667] Assembly dutifully elected the black general Christophe president of
 Haiti. However, belonging as he did to Dessalines' school of thought
 —unrestricted rule by a strong man—he indignantly refused to be
 bound by such a constitution; when the Assembly, instead of yielding

3. This statement is cited, with evident disavow, by Thomas Madiou, *Histoire d'Haiti*, III, 114.

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perfectly educated, and because other matters seemed infinitely more pressing than the setting up of schools, the early Haitians, united in 1804, fell apart within a single generation. On one hand were the elite and a few other townspeople who knew at least something of the outside world; on the other the masses of toiling countryfolk to whom tiny Haitian valleys were the whole universe. The young men of these two classes coming to power could not understand each other; they could not make concessions to each other; and as they fought for what they held true, each grew suspicious of the other if not permanently hostile. The lack of common understanding might still have been repaired in any one generation, but no single president had the vision to inaugurate universal education. Aside from the expense, certain powerful elite citizens often expressed their doubts as to the educability of the peasants; as property owners they would undoubtedly have objected to the unsettling of the economic order, which was based upon the work of an ignorant mass of blacks.¹⁶

Without education, the political sphere went unenriched by any flow of new blood from the people. Politics existed in a vacuum. The earthy, candid criticisms of a politically conscious folk never invigorated the discussion of national affairs. Without education, the people had no standards of comparison of Haiti with other nations, and were the easy dupes of whatever insurrectionary agitator could persuade them that their daily woes were caused by the current administration. Without education, high political office became a prerogative of the few, a contest between the Ins and the Outs, a path to personal wealth. Without education, Haiti could never be more than a dictatorship by a man or a clique, her stability endangered with the downfall of each incumbent, for dictatorships rarely provide for continuity in government.

Another great weakness was the notion that national happiness could be achieved by political means primarily. After the germinal ideas of Christophe and Pétion, which had a basis in economic behavior, hardly another important concept came out of a century of presidents. Haitian politicians have been great arrangers: they have given the country eighteen constitutions and innumerable codes, all admirable in their loving solicitude for precise detail. The common feeling of political aspirants has been, "If we are given power, all will

16. This argument is clearly stated in Madison, *op. cit.*, III, 176 ff.

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441 Justice in the courts was administered by Haitians whose narrow patriotism biased their decisions.

439 5. A temperamental tariff policy. Not only were imports subject
638 to a tariff which might be changed at the whim of any president, but
175 exports also were taxed. When an administration was in need of
651 funds it might suddenly, without warning, raise the tax on coffee
489 exports and so disrupt a merchant's business plans. The customs-
houses were in charge of Haitians who steadily became more ineffi-
cient and grasping as the century progressed, until many foreign
merchants felt that the only way of getting business dispatched was
by means of bribes. Examinations at customs were long drawn out,
often there was open thievery, and erroneous valuations were
common.

175 6. The burden of the indemnity to France. Contracted by Boyer
652 in 1825, this annual payment for sixty years was an incubus to every
[648] administration, leaving no surplus in the treasury for public works,
education, or any internal development; likewise, it made the threat
of foreign interference all the more imminent.

7. A debased currency. Pétion was the first president to devalue
money, and his example was frequently followed thereafter. Coun-
terfeiting was general. When a country's monetary system is
unstable, its officials accustomed to bribery and graft," and its
financial structure almost nonexistent, there is little chance for
sound economic development.

175 8. Dependence upon a single crop. Haitian economy was tied to
245 the staple coffee, grown with indifferent care, prepared for the
market in outmoded fashion, and sold in competition with coffee
from more scientifically run plantations in other tropical countries.

175 9. Political instability. The recurrent revolutions in Haiti made
439 foreigners chary of participating in the country's business, since the
66 government which made a contract might be out of office before the
ink was dry.

175 10. Indifference of the élite to economic pursuits. What profits
439 were obtainable went into the pockets of foreign merchants, not
508 those of Haitian businessmen. In 1842 the comparative exports of the

[643] 17. Sir Spenser St. John, always a bitter critic of Haiti, remarked (*Hayti, or The*
[154] *Black Republic*, p. 88) sardonically that "Boyer had the rare quality of being honest,
[661] and left in the treasury, on his departure, the sum of 200,000, the first and last chief
who was ever guilty of so unaccountable a weakness."

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HAITIAN PROBLEMS

FOR a citizen of the United States or a European country, national problems have to do with external as well as internal affairs. Foreign relations, armaments, international trade, treaties and commitments, loom as large as do unemployment, business depression, labor troubles, and social maladjustment. Political parties rise and fall with their promises or failures to deal successfully with matters arising from the country's position relative to world movements. In Haiti such generalizations do not hold. Her international relations have been and are comparatively minor, while her internal problems have been of a different order from those which trouble most of the rest of the Western World. This is not meant to imply that a world depression leaves Haiti unscathed, or that the country does not suffer when its trade in coffee is interrupted, but rather that its persistent problems would continue to exist whatever the state of world politics and economics.

Contacts of the Haitian people with the outside world between 1804 and 1915 were meagre. The slaughter of whites by Dessalines, the economic decline of the country, unwillingness of white nations to treat with a Negro state, the schism in the Catholic Church, restrictive legislation against white foreigners, general illiteracy of the people—all these shut Haiti off from the world. Christophe, it is true, invited in a few English schoolmasters and agricultural experts, but these remained only a short while and had little influence even among the élite. For a century Haiti saw no foreigners except the few traders at seaports, an occasional Wesleyan missionary, a limited number of consuls and ministers, certain travelers interested in odd corners of the earth, and, after 1860, Catholic priests and sisters. For the peasants there ceased to be any knowledge of the world outside of Haiti; for the élite France once more became the centre of the social universe, as it had been for the affranchis in colonial times. From Boyer's time onward élite youths went to Paris for an education, if they could afford it; the "culture" they acquired there had little relationship to Haitian problems.

Foreign relations, in the political sense, revolved during most of

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